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SUBJECT: EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT SET TO CONFIRM BARROSO SEPT. 16 AS
COMMISSION HEAD; MARGIN OF VICTORY COUNTS

REF: USEU BRUSSELS 877 and 975

Sensitive but Unclassified. Please handle accordingly.

¶1. (U) Summary: The European Parliament (EP) will likely re-elect European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso on September 16. Under current Treaty of Nice rules, Barroso needs only a simple majority of the MEPs present to be re-elected, which he should have. However, Barroso, the only declared candidate for the post, will aim for an absolute majority to win more credibility and avoid any calls for a re-vote under the Lisbon Treaty. The Socialist group continues to negotiate its eventual support of Barroso's candidacy in exchange for Socialist gains in the next Commission. The European Parliament will likely vote later this year to confirm the next group of Commissioners. End Summary

¶2. (U) After two-and-a-half months of uncertainty, the European Parliament political group leaders decided September 10 that the plenary vote to approve European Commission President Barroso's new five-year term would take place on September 16. The Socialists and Greens tried once again to postpone the vote until after the Irish Lisbon treaty referendum October 2; unlike in June, they were unsuccessful.

VICTORY SECURED BUT SEEKING LARGER MAJORITY

¶3. (U) Barroso should be able to secure a simple majority of votes cast, as required under the Nice Treaty. However, Barroso's political credibility will be enhanced if he secures an absolute majority, as required in the Lisbon Treaty, especially if the next Commission were to be elected later under the rules of the soon-to-be-decided Lisbon Treaty.

¶4. (U) The vote on September 16 will be by secret ballot, and there will be some abstentions, making the outcome somewhat less than certain. With his current apparent support, however, Barroso is close to an absolute majority of 369 votes. Both his own center-right EPP group (265 seats) and the new ECR conservative group (54 seats) have declared their support. Barroso has also secured a majority of the 84 Liberal and Democrats (ALDE) MEPs, according to their leader Guy Verhofstadt. The 55 members of the Greens-EFA and the 35 members of the radical left (GUE-NGL), however, will likely vote against his re-election.

¶5. (U) Barroso won promises of most of the Liberal and Democrats (ALDE) group's support by including some of their demands in his proposed program, including the creation of a new post of Commissioner for Human Rights and Civil Liberties. He also promised to create a European financial supervisor and work on a special EU tax to guarantee the EU's own resources in the next five-year financial plan, starting in 2013. That said, six French MoDem members of ALDE, and a few others, have said they will vote no.

SOCIALISTS, ALBEIT DIVIDED, CAN MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

16. (U) Barroso's ability to reach an absolute majority may depend on the Socialists, who are divided on the question. Spanish and Portuguese Socialist MEPs say they will vote in favor of Barroso, for example. Socialist group leader Martin Schulz told the press his negotiating position with Barroso is weak since, for one reason, seven Socialist heads of government already support Barroso. Schulz said he hoped to offer Barroso his group's support in exchange for written assurances of social measures, such as a new directive, stion of a second vote pass.

COMMENT

18. (SBU) The decision by the European Parliament to vote on Barroso September 16 will reassure those who want the European Commission to have a confirmed leader at the upcoming G20 and Copenhagen summits, and that consideration alone might produce an absolute majority. After the vote, Barroso will, in close collaboration with EU Member

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States, form a new College of Commissioners. Should the Lisbon Treaty pass, the European Council meeting October 29-30 could extend the term of the current Commissioners by a couple of months to allow time to enter Lisbon into force. Whatever the Treaty, Nice or Lisbon, the EP will eventually vote to confirm the next College of Commissioners. According to the EP Secretary General, the EP will likely flex its muscles by rejecting one or two nominated Commissioners, as it did in 2004. Although the EP can only vote on the entire Commission, not on specific Commissioners, it was able then to force some member states to propose new names and Barroso to reshuffle portfolios by threatening to reject the proposed College. In any event, a new Commission should start working officially by January 2010.

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